

Memories

by Elicia Shreve

It had been a long day, for more than one reason. As she sat down on her bed to take her shoes off, she thought back over the day, which led to thinking about the past few years. A lot had happened in five years. It started with her father's death, and he was the reason for the hard day and the train of thought of the evening.

Shortly after her father died, she had gotten divorced, which ended with her living with her mother and paternal grandmother, neither of whom were in the best of health. Of course this day had been hard, five years exactly, so everyone in the house was in a funk.

"Dad, we miss you." She whispered looking at the picture of him on the wall. It was of the only time she had seen him in a tuxedo. He had never worn one before, even for his own wedding, but he had worn one at her sister's wedding.

"She's going to drive me crazy." She tossed her shoes in the corner. "Today was horrible, and I can't blame her, but I always get the brunt of it."

She sighed and climbed under the covers, falling asleep almost instantly.

"You've been patient with her." She looked for where the voice came from. He was sitting on a bench in front of her. Her father looked just as she remembered him, and she hugged him hard as she cried.

"Dad."

"I know she's hard to deal with sometimes. You've been patient, and put up with a lot more than you should have to." He looked down at her.

"I can't keep doing this alone. I needed you, why did you leave then?" She was up for the summer when she decided not to go back to her then husband. "I was dealing with so much, I needed your advice so many times, but you were gone. I had to go through it alone."

He sat silent while she sobbed, his hand on her shoulder. When he died, it was sudden. His liver had suddenly given out, and he was rushed to the hospital when the poisons in his body caused him to collapse. He was dead when they got to the hospital. She had woken up that morning a woman going through a divorce from a

nearly twenty year marriage and had gone to bed as her mother's life preserver and planning her father's funeral. She never wanted any of this, and felt like she had failed at her own life, at everything.

"You were never really alone. You might not have been able to see me, but I was there. I heard every word you said to me. I will never really leave you or any of the others." He pulled her close, so her head rested on his shoulder. "I'm sorry you never heard me."

"What am I supposed to do? I can't keep going like this with her, with either of them. I get all of it from both of them, and I am so tired Dad." She sat up, looking at him again. "I run for them both constantly, I listen to their bickering, I listen to Mom complain constantly about the others, I listen to Grandma complain about everything and find fault with everything, and I can't get anything done I need to do. I can't keep this up."

Around them the setting changed, going from the open field they were sitting in to the edge of a lake. A short way across the water cat-tails grew, a black lab swimming in front of them.

"Brutus!" Her eyes lit up, laughing as she called the dog. "I take it you remember this place." Her father smiled, skipping a rock across the water.

"I loved the trips to the water with him, I would never forget this." She picked up a stick and threw it as far into the water as she could. The black lab chased it, bounding through the water. With a laugh, she had to ask. "We've never had a normal dog have we."

He chuckled. "Nope. You honestly think a normal one would have fit in with our family?"

"That's a good point."

Again the setting changed. This time they were sitting in the living room of the house she grew up in, the one she lay sleeping in now. It was the day after Christmas, and while her father stood beside her, there was a version of him on the stairs in front of her talking to the child version of her.

"Why are we here? I don't want to see this, I remember it way too well."

"It's a reminder. Yes, that day was sad, but just that morning you had been having fun and enjoying the holidays. That's what you should remember, not these sad moments."

She stood in silence for a long moment, and the scene changed one last time around them. They were back in the field on the bench.

"Dad, I still need you, I need your help, your strength. I still need my dad."

"You never stop needing the people you love honey, but time moves on, and nobody can stay forever. It was just my time to go."

Her tears had started again, knowing this was as close as she would ever get to talking to him again. She knew it was all a dream, and it hurt knowing she would have to wake up to a world where she didn't have him.

"You've been through so much, but you've grown and changed too. You're more yourself now than you were when I left. You are so much stronger than you know."

"I don't feel like it."

"I know, but you are. You'll get through this, and come out the other side shining. I have faith in you. I love you."

She woke up feeling better than she had since the day her father died. She would make it.